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RUEHXS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 6935
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 9582
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5407
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 000907

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: THAILAND PROTEST UPDATE: LARGE RED RALLY IN
BANGKOK PEACEFUL SO FAR

REF: BANGKOK 893

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Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The red-shirt's self-proclaimed "D-Day" rally dominated Bangkok April 8, with crowds growing to 70,000 by late afternoon, expected to peak in the evening, and to carry over into April 9. As of COB, there has been no violence reported. However, Royal Thai Government (RTG) officials such as DPM Suthep remain wary, concerned that fugitive former PM Thaksin aims to use the red rally to pressure the RTG to cut a deal with him and that violence could yet break out.

¶2. (C) Comment: While the red-shirt demands are clear, how they expect to achieve them peacefully is not. Most commentators expect the rally to end prior to the upcoming Thai traditional New Year Songkhran, which formally starts April 13 but for many communities begins April 11. We will monitor developments carefully and ensure RSO and Consular generated messages to the Embassy and American expat community are kept current. End Summary and Comment.

"Toss Out the Aristocrats"

¶3. (SBU) Thai political dynamics continued down its street protest path April 8, the self-proclaimed "D-Day" for anti-government red-shirt protesters rallying under the United Front of Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD). The red-shirts reiterated previous calls for PM Abhisit and several key Privy Council members to resign, but the rally took on a sharpened class element with the appearance of a new slogan on the red stage near Government House: "Toss out the aristocrats" (khon amat). The slogan was a reference to fugitive former PM Thaksin's charge that Privy Councilors and elite bureaucrats had conspired to oust him from office in the 2006 coup and deny Thailand true democracy. In a video-link address to demonstrators the evening of April 7, Thaksin urged supporters to attend the April 8 rally, saying: "those who want real democracy should gather in great numbers."

¶4. (SBU) Starting from an early morning base of 30,000 and growing to 70,000 by late afternoon, red-shirts expanded from their Government House blockade in place since March 26 to the nearby Royal Plaza and to the residence of Privy Councilor Chairman GEN Prem. POL staff on site estimated the red crowd near Prem's house alone at 35,000 mid-afternoon. We expect the crowds to peak in the evening and carry over into April 9; one UDD leader claimed the protest at Prem's house would last three days.

¶5. (SBU) The Metropolitan Police Bureau,s (MPB) Operation Center told us that they had deployed roughly 5000 police officers at Government House and Prem's residence in an effort to maintain peace and security in the face of a crowd that they estimated could reach 80,000-100,000 by the end of the day. Police and army sources confirmed to us that the police and 21 army companies in reserve were unarmed, apart from standard riot control gear (shields and tear gas).

¶6. (SBU) As of COB, there were no reports of violence on April 8. UDD co-leader Vira Musikapong made an appeal to security officials to arrest any demonstrators nationwide found to be destroying state property, claiming that such individuals were not "real reds." (note: We had counseled Vira to make a call for red-shirts to stick to peaceful measures in a March 31 meeting, and a follow-up April 7 exchange after a group of redshirts assaulted PM Abhisit's motorcade in Pattaya April 7 as it was stuck in traffic, breaking a window and attempting to drag Abhisit out of his vehicle. see reftel).

Government's response: lay low, watch with concern

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¶7. (SBU) Government Spokesman Panitan told us mid-afternoon that the Royal Thai Government (RTG) continued to monitor the protests and that PM Abhisit would likely issue a statement early April 9 on the situation, depending on events later in the evening. Abhisit, speaking to reporters, rejected red-shirt calls for his resignation.

¶8. (C) DPM Suthep, the RTG's point person on security and the power broker behind the current coalition, told Australian diplomats visiting Democrat Party headquarters mid-afternoon that the RTG expected the crowd to peak April 9 and that they were worried violence could still break out because the rally was Thaksin's tactic to pressure the Democrats to cut a deal with him. Suthep characterized the private deal Thaksin sought as close to the public UDD demands: resignation of Privy Council Chair Prem; dissolution of parliament (via Abhisit's resignation); and amnesty for Thaksin. Suthep said that he had counselled Abhisit to stand firm and not consider such a deal, despite the risk that Thaksin would escalate street action.

Side Drama #1: Newin,s Appeal

¶9. (SBU) Adding to the political drama, former Thaksin crony and erstwhile red-shirt organizer Newin Chidchob, who abandoned Thaksin last December to help form the current Democrat-led government, joined efforts to preemptively dampen the demonstrations at an emotional April 7 news conference. Newin challenged Thaksin to "stop offending the Monarchy," warned the UDD was making preparations to lead the country into chaos, and implored people not to join the protests. Thaksin responded to Newin in a video-link speech later April 7, referring to Newin as a villain and criticizing him for his sudden turn to support the Democrats. Thaksin also insisted he was loyal to the Monarchy.

Side Drama #2: Alleged Assassination Plot

¶10. (SBU) In a bizarre twist that may be tangentially related to the protest, Thai police claimed late April 7 to have foiled a plot to foment national unrest by assassinating a privy counselor and burning down 10 banks in Bangkok this week. The three suspects arrested late April 7 allegedly confessed to police that they were paid by "someone in uniform" to carry out a contract hit on someone who turned out to be Privy Councilor and former Supreme Court President Charnchai Likitjitta. Charnchai was one of six people denounced by Thaksin for attending a May 2006 dinner allegedly convened to plot the eventual coup and one of three Privy Councilors, along with Prem and Surayud, from whom red leaders demanded resignations. (Note: Charnchai served as Minister of Justice in the post-coup interim government and subsequently joined the Privy Council. End note.) Police then arrested a fourth suspect - 11th Infantry Regiment Major Thienchai. A trusted contact with good sources inside security forces told us that Thienchai confessed that the plot also involved planned arson attacks against 10 banks in Bangkok. We cannot confirm any of the details of this plot, however.

JOHN